



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Program
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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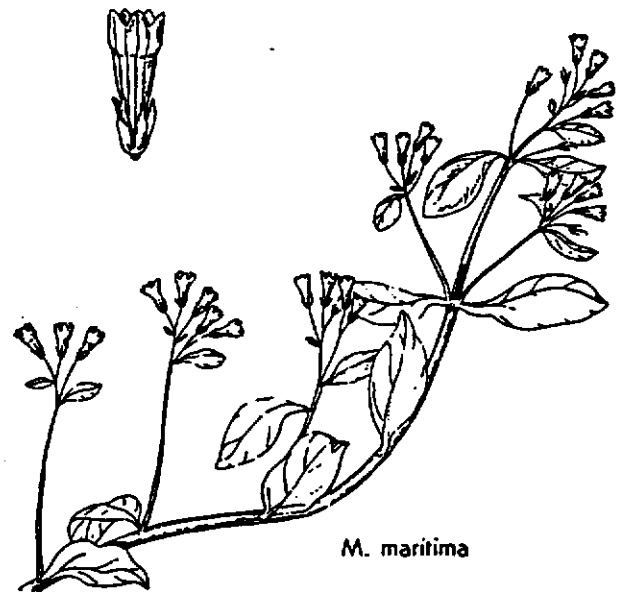
MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

OYSTERLEAF

(*Mertensia maritima* (L.) S.F. Gray)

Description

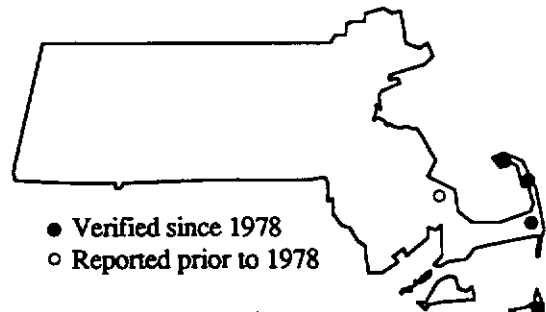
Oysterleaf is an herbaceous, prostrate, hairless perennial in the Borage or Forget-Me-Not family (Boraginaceae). The overall aspect of the plant is glaucous or whitish. Its trailing stems reach up to 1 m (3.3 ft.) in length. The plant's common name comes from its alternate, 2-6 cm (0.8 - 2.4 in.) long leaves: These fleshy, ovate or broadly wedge-shaped leaves are reputed to have an oyster-like taste. The 6-9 mm (0.24 - 0.35 in.) long, bell-shaped flowers are pink when young and mature to a pale blue. Oysterleaf has a five-lobed calyx (outermost floral whorl) and five stamens. Such pentamerous flowers are characteristic of the Borage family.



Gleason, H.A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.



Documented Range of
Oysterleaf



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Oysterleaf flowers in August, and the smooth, shiny, sharply angled nutlets mature from about the middle of July to early September.

Range

Oysterleaf is found on Arctic and Atlantic beaches. Its North American range has been documented as extending along sea beaches from Newfoundland to Massachusetts and from Alaska to British Columbia.

Similar Species

None of the plants that grow in oysterleaf's habitat could be confused with it. Oysterleaf is a very distinctive plant, especially when in flower.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Oysterleaf is found on the foredunes of beaches, where there is active sand deposition. In Massachusetts, habitats include a maritime sand spit, an area of sparsely vegetated sand on an upper beach, and the upper edge of a sand berm on a barrier-beach sandspit. Plant species associated with oysterleaf include sea poppy (*Glaucium flavum*), seabeach knotweed (*Polygonum glaucum*), seaside spurge (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*), and various species of orach (*Atriplex* spp.) and beach grass (*Ammophila* spp.).

Population Status

Oysterleaf is presently listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts. There are seven current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in four towns and seven historical stations (unverified since 1978) in two towns. (One town has both historical and current stations and is represented by one solid dot on the town distribution map.) Reasons for the plant's rarity in the Commonwealth include destruction of habitat by off-road vehicles (ORVs) and the fact that Massachusetts is at the southern edge of the plant's range. In addition to ORVs, foot traffic and storms threaten oysterleaf populations. Oysterleaf is also considered rare in Maine.